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The romance cycle of Charlemagne and his peere. 2d ed.

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Popular Studies in Mythology Romance & Folklore

6d. net each

No. 10 — The Romance Cycle of Charlemagne and his Peers. By Jessie L. Weston

Second Edition

Published by David Nutt, at the Sign of the Phœnix, Long Acre, London
1905

Popular Studies in Mythology, Romance and Folklore

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BY

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

The following study has been designed as a companion to the earlier essay on "King Arthur and his Knights." No series dealing with Mediæval Romance could claim to be in any sense complete were the great cycle which gave an impetus to the evolution of European romantic literature omitted. A complete account is as yet hardly possible however; many of the principal texts are still unedited, and students are largely dependent upon travaux d'ensemble *completed many years ago. But the process of editing texts is proceeding steadily, and students who desire a closer acquaintance with the cycle will see from the Bibliography appended that a considerable amount of material is already available; we may reasonably hope that a few years will place us in possession of critical editions*

of all the leading texts of the Charlemagne and its subsidiary cycles.

PARIS, *March* 1901.

A few slight changes have been made in the text, and the Bibliography has been brought up to date, otherwise this second issue is unaltered.

JESSIE L. WESTON.

PARIS, *September* 1905.

THE
CHARLEMAGNE ROMANCES

"*Ne sont que trois matières à nul home entendant*
De France, de Bretagne, et de Rome le grant."

The Middle Ages were, as we know, the ages of Romance; Romance embodied in Prose—pseudo-historic chronicles, pseudo-biographical accounts of noted heroes; in Poetry—short *lais*, longer poems (metrical romances as we call them), some independent, the greater number falling into groups round some one central figure, and in their entirety forming what we call cycles of Romance. To the mind of a writer of the twelfth century, whose words are quoted above (Jean Bodel, author of *La Chanson des Saisnes*), there were three of such cycles, and to them alone might the attention of a poet of that day be worthily directed; and of these cycles the respective centres were Charlemagne, Arthur, and Alexander.

To-day this seems a somewhat inadequate method of classification, ignoring as it does the great mass of Northern tradition (Siegfried is

surely a hero worthy of attention), yet it provides those who pursue the study of mediæval literature with a useful formula of designation for the two great bodies of French romance, the cycles of Charlemagne and of Arthur; the *Matières* of France and of Britain.

In the introductory number of these studies the Charlemagne romances have been alluded to, and incidentally discussed, but the subject matter of the study, *The Influence of Celtic upon Mediæval Romance*, was naturally far more closely connected with the second branch of Romantic literature, the Arthurian cycle; with Charlemagne Celtic legend has but little to do. In its later stages, when the *Matière de France* came into contact with the Arthurian story, the very soul of which is Celtic, it borrowed certain features from the *Matière de Bretagne*, but even then the fairy element, inseparable from the latter, presents itself partially, at least, under a Teutonic form. It was the *Matière de Bretagne* rather than that of France which was discussed in the opening study of this series. In the fourth number the various romances constituting the Arthurian cycle were described and classified, and in the fourteenth the Grail romances, forming a distinct section of that cycle with which their connection is late and artificial, was similarly

treated; but so far the Charlemagne cycle has not received the notice which its importance demands.

It is natural that alike to English writers and English readers the cycle which Jean Bodel reckoned second in value should stand first in charm and attraction; indeed, it may be doubted whether those for whom he wrote did not judge even as we do; in purely *literary* value the Arthurian cycle is probably superior to that of Charlemagne; the latter can count on its roll no such names as those of Chrétien de Troyes, Hartmann von Aue, or Wolfram von Eschenbach.[1]

So far as the French literary presentment is concerned, the Charlemagne cycle is the elder, and the poems composing it, though the versions that have descended to us are not the earliest versions of the tales they tell, are as a rule cast in a form more primitive than that adopted by the writers of the Arthurian cycle. The prevailing form of the French Arthurian romance, one not found before the twelfth century, is a poem of eight syllabic lines, each pair rhyming; whereas in the Charlemagne *Chansons de Geste* we find *laisses* or *tirades* of varying length distinguished by a monorhyme, with, in the earliest copies, a vowel asso-

[1] In saying this I do not ignore the high epic value of the *Chanson de Roland*, I rather refer to a conscious effort after perfection of literary form.

nance prevailing throughout the *laisse*. This metrical form may be compared with the alliterative verse which in the Germanic languages was replaced by various forms of the rhyming couplet or stanza. Yet, in so far as the subject matter is concerned, dealing as it does largely with mythic and pre-historic elements, the Arthurian cycle may be deemed the older.

Before entering into a detailed discussion of the romances dealing with the *Matière de France*, it will, I think, be not unprofitable to make clear to our own minds the distinctive characteristics of these two great bodies of romance; both of them of extreme importance in the history of literature, yet differing so widely the one from the other that even where they have come into contact the influence resultant has been of the slightest and most superficial character. In general terms we may express this difference by saying that the groundwork of the Arthurian cycle is mainly mythical, that of the Charlemagne cycle mainly historical. This does not imply that there are no historical elements in the former cycle, and no mythical in the latter, or that, as contrasted with the great Emperor of the Franks, Arthur is a mere creation of the imagination. On the contrary, in all probability the leading lines of the Arthur-legend proper, the King's fights with the Saxons, his betrayal by wife and nephew, and

death in battle have a foundation in fact, while the Charlemagne of legend is in many respects a wide departure from the Charlemagne of history. But the real charm and abiding fascination of the Arthurian story lies in the realm of fancy and not of fact—*realms*, perhaps we should rather say, for the student of Arthurian romance is free of more than one kingdom: the land of faëry whose horizon is lost in the mists of Celtic heathendom, and the brighter, but no less elusive, land where ideal chivalry has sworn a close alliance with Christian mysticism.

It is true that not all chronicled in the Charlemagne romances has its parallel in historic reality; myth has certainly played a part in the stories of the hero's birth and early trials, but in its main lines the character of these romances is determined by historic facts. Such heroes as Huon de Bordeaux and Girard de Viane may be creatures of imagination, but the struggles of the feudal nobles against their over-lord are facts of stern reality; Vivien may never have lived, and rashly vowed, and shed his blood heroically at the gates of Arles, but at least the varying fortunes of the contests between Christian and Saracen for the fertile lands of Southern France are as historical as the fights of our ancestors with Saxon and Dane; and if Ganelon never betrayed his king and country, yet Roland died at Roncevaux.

Again, the Charlemagne story has its supernatural element, but it is not that of wizardry and faëry as in the Arthurian story; there is no shape-shifting Merlin, no treacherous Morgain, or beneficent Lady of the Lake. Nor is it laden with wondrous hints and revelations of divine doctrines and mysteries as in the Grail romances. The supernatural machinery is celestial and strictly simple; a guardian angel watches by the emperor's pillow, and shields him from his foes; in answer to his prayer a hart shows his army the ford across the swollen stream; at his death St. James of Compostella is beheld in a vision casting into a balance, wherein the devil weighs the emperor's good and evil deeds, the churches and shrines Charlemagne has erected in his honour.

When, in the last stage of its development, the fairy element enters the Charlemagne cycle it is manifestly due to the influence of Arthurian romance; thus Huon of Bordeaux is aided by Oberon, the fairy king (who is, indeed, rather a Teutonic elf (*alfar*) than a Celtic fairy), but Oberon is the son of Morgain, and the rightful heir to his kingdom, with whom Huon must come to terms, is Arthur. Ogier and Renouart alike live on in fairyland (though each is supposed to have ended his days as a monk!), but that fairyland is Avalon. The supernatural element proper to the legend is presented under

the simplest and most obvious form, that of direct Divine protection.

That the characterisation of the Charlemagne cycle should be more forcible than that of the Arthurian is only what we should expect; the authors of the *Chansons* were dealing with real men and women, like to, if not of, themselves. Charlemagne plays a far more important *rôle* than does Arthur. The British king is, after all, little more than a picturesque centre for a series of adventures in which he himself takes no part. He certainly leads his hosts to battle, but it must be admitted that the wars of the Arthurian story are its least interesting and most wearisome portion; otherwise, Arthur presides in a dignified manner at feasts, and invites adventures, which his knights achieve; as a personality he is not convincing.

And of his knights Gawain, with all his grace and courtesy, has about him that note of elusiveness that makes one realise that his proper destination is, like Arthur, the land of faëry. Lancelot is but a stage lover; Galahad a painted-window saint. Perceval and Tristan, as we meet them first, are indeed human, very creatures of flesh and blood, but the Arthurian story is not content to leave them so, the former it turns into a being scarcely less shadowy than Galahad, the latter into a lover as conventional as Lancelot.

But in the Charlemagne romances it is otherwise. The old Emperor, with his long white beard, is a majestic figure, which even the hint of years impossibly prolonged cannot rob of its reality. His intense family affections, his uncontrolled temper, violent fits of rage, savage revenge and unreasoning tyranny are all real. We feel the relationship between him and Roland to be no mere literary convention. The younger man, with his fierce temper, indomitable pride, and reckless courage, is exactly what we should expect Charlemagne's next of kin to be. Oliver, equally brave but less hot-headed, ready to temper his valour with discretion, is quite as real as his friend. Very real, too, that doughty champion of the church militant, Archbishop Turpin; and Ganelon, whose treason is in truth the attempt of a cowardly man to revenge himself upon one who has thrust him against his will into a post of danger.

> "Rollanz m'fors fist en or et en aveir,
> Pur que jo quis sa mort et sun destreit;
> Mais traïsun nule n'en i otrei."

Convincing, too, is William of Orange; now battling valiantly against the overpowering force of his Saracen foes; now melting into tenderness over his dying nephew; and again wrathfully demanding aid from his pious and peace-loving

brother-in-law, King Louis—who wishes himself otherwhere. The impression left upon us is that if these heroes did not really live, they might well have done so. We are not surprised that in his journey through the other world Dante beheld a goodly group of souls of the Charlemagne heroes, while of the Arthurian he saw none, save Tristan. Apart from their literary interest, the Charlemagne cycle appeals rather to the student of History, the Arthurian cycle to the student of Folk-lore.

The literary development of the two cycles not only sets the above-noted differences in a vivid light, but illustrates their true nature, and enables us to realise the history reflected in the Charlemagne cycle. The great Emperor died in 814, and with him died, as we can see, the conception of a France forming an integral portion of a vast Germano-Roman Empire. The warriors who followed Clovis and Dagobert, the companions of Charles the Hammer and of Pepin the Little, had in the course of centuries been putting off their Germanhood, been differentiating themselves from their kinsmen across the Rhine. The popular songs commemorating the mighty feats of Merwing and Karling kings, songs of which monkish chroniclers have preserved us a few scraps in their barbarous verse, or of which they have partially rendered the substance in their dreary prose—these songs, originally German, gradually

passed into *Roman*, the language of the conquered race, as the Germanic element weakened. After Charlemagne's death his empire broke up, the *Roman* portion was cut definitely loose from the German-speaking world, and in less than a century the last traces of German speech vanished. The descendants of Frankish and Burgundian conquerors became French, and every fragment of German hero-song either put on a *Roman* dress or else died out. Small wonder if in the process the historic basis was shifted, if the deeds of earlier chiefs and warriors got transferred to the great Emperor. The fame and achievements of the latter would indeed have sufficed to inspire popular minstrels; but he also inherited the renown of many predecessors, and thus the earliest singers of his glory found themselves from the outset in possession of no inconsiderable stock of poetic material. The songs accumulated during the ninth century, and the decadence of the later Carolingians, threw into stronger relief the prowess and fame of Charlemagne.

As early, perhaps, as the first third of the tenth century, certainly by the middle of the century, *Chansons de Geste*, as distinguished from the popular songs on which they were based, had begun to appear, professing to narrate events of Charlemagne's lifetime. Throughout the tenth, eleventh, and early twelfth centuries these *Chan-*

sons were being enlarged, worked over, adapted to cyclic requirements. These two hundred years were fertile in strong characters, in fierce passions, in events and movements which transformed the old Franko-Roman Empire into modern France. The Carolingian polity decayed and passed away; the Capets, embodying the aspirations and ideals of a new nationality, rose to power, and founded a monarchy destined to last for eight hundred years, and to incarnate, far more than was the case in England, the national genius. The pangs and throes which accompanied the birth of modern France were fierce and prolonged; Norman and Saracen assailed from without; king and feudatory grappled in deadly struggle within. All this we find mirrored in the *Chanson de Geste*. Itself the record of a nation's formation, it exercised, we cannot doubt, a formative influence, the force of which it were hard to overestimate. Germanic in its pristine essence as it was, Germanic as it remained in many of its animating ideas, it is in its highest moments a magnificent record of French patriotic feeling, an ardent fosterer of devotion to the fair land apostrophised by Roland—

"Tere de France, mult estes dulz païs!"

From this, the creative period of the French epic, we possess comparatively little in an authentic and ungarbled form. Chief of what has come down to us is the earliest version of the *Chanson*

de Roland, and even this, there can be little doubt, represents a fairly advanced stage of development. The great bulk of Charlemagne romances belong to a period reaching from the early twelfth into the fourteenth century. The main outlines of the *Chanson de Geste* had been determined, its leading types of character and incident had been settled, it had acquired a prodigious stock of conventions, it still in a large measure reflected the religious and social ideas of the time; thus it could not escape the hands of the adapter, the rearranger, the hack writer who thought more of dressing up time-honoured stories according to the literary fashion of the moment than of preserving their original spirit and form. From the middle of the twelfth century it was exposed to the competition of the Arthurian stories—a competition against which, as we have seen, it largely defended itself by adopting the tone and style and temper of its rival.

How different was the fate of the Arthurian romance on French soil! It came into French hands with a stock of incidents and characters, above all with an æsthetic, and what, in default of a better term, must be styled an ethical character of its own, which persist despite the modifications imposed by the alien French genius. Its period of evolution is comparatively short; in from fifty to one hundred years it runs its full course; its

development is not determined by nor does it mirror the political situation or the political changes of the period. Vast and far-reaching social changes it does indeed herald and record, but indirectly and symbolically, not, as is the case with the *Chanson de Geste*, directly and realistically. The one body of literature is a monument of French intellect and French artistry exercising themselves upon an alien and imperfectly comprehended subject matter; the other is the nation typified, recording as it does its fierce birth-pangs, its wild and dour *enfances*, the exultant spirit of its early manhood.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the popularity, in mediæval times, of the Charlemagne cycle, or its importance as a factor in the history of European literature. In Italy it was the parent of a literature scarcely less extensive than that from which it sprang; indeed, the evolution was more complete. Italy yields pseudo-historical chronicles and metrical romances representing the legend at every stage: from that of historic reality, as typified by the rough-hewn figures of Roland and Oliver at the portal of Verona Cathedral, to that of pure fantasy, as in the *Orlando Amoroso* and *Orlando Furioso*. In Spain the Charlemagne story, as related in the *Chronica* of Alfonso X., gave impetus to the formation of a national cycle, the heroes of which—Bernardo del

Carpio, the children of Lara, and the Cid—should rival in popularity the heroes of the earlier *gestes*. In Scandinavia and in Germany the romances found translators and imitators, while in England we fail to realise that our *Sir Bevis of Hampton* is but an imitation of a French poem, and is reckoned by scholars as an offshoot of the cycle; while a nobleman and statesman like Lord Berners thought the translation of the tale of *Huon of Bordeaux* a task not unworthy of his time and labour. And have not we here in England the honour of possessing, in the MS. of the Bodleian Library, the oldest known copy of the most famous song of the cycle, the *Chanson de Roland*?

To undertake to give, in the small compass of one of these studies, an adequate account of so large and important a body of literature (M. Leon Gautier, in his *Épopées Françaises*, reckons *eighty* chansons as belonging to what he terms "la geste du roi" alone, without considering the subordinate cycle of the Narbonnais) would of course be impossible; the utmost that can be done is to describe the general character of the cycle, the lines into which it falls, and note the romances which will best repay the attention of the ordinary student of literature. Those who desire a more detailed account will do well to consult M. Leon Gautier's monumental work, *Les Épopées Françaises*, or the shorter but no less

scientific, and, it may be, better arranged *Histoire Poétique de Charlemagne*, by M. Gaston Paris.

The dividing line of the Charlemagne romances is less individual than in the case of the Arthurian cycle; there, it is comparatively easy to classify the romances according to the knight who is hero of the tale. The leading heroes of the Round Table form so many centres round which the romances respectively group themselves, and the collective mass of these smaller groups or subsidiary cycles make up the great Arthurian legend. But with Charlemagne and his peers this guiding principle will no longer serve us. There are certainly many romances borrowing their title from the hero of the adventures they relate, but none of Charlemagne's warriors save William of Orange, the Marquis *au court nez*, have anything like such a body of romance connected with them as have Gawain, Perceval, or Lancelot, or can fairly be described as hero of a "cycle." The Charlemagne romances deal rather with families than with individuals; they are *Chansons de Geste*,[1] lays dealing with the

[1] The translation of the word *Geste* is somewhat difficult; the meaning appears to have been originally chronicles = feats, then the feats or actions of a particular family = family or race. In this sense M. Gautier employs it, but I incline to think that the earlier meaning is the more correct; the concluding words of the *Chanson de Roland*, "Ci falt la Geste que Turoldus declinet," cannot possibly have the signification of *race* or *family*.

feats of a race rather than of a person. The tendency is to look upon qualities, not as the individual characteristics of *one* member of a family, but as the natural and inevitable inheritance of all. Valour and loyalty, cowardice and treachery, alike pass from father to son. Thus one group of poems deals with the heroic virtues of the descendants of Garin de Montglane, another with the treacherous race of Doon de Mayence.

But the more convenient method of classification, that followed by M. Gaston Paris, is to group the romances according to their subject matter as relating to the Emperor, for Charlemagne, as we have noted above, plays a far more important part in his cycle than does Arthur. Following these lines, we shall find one group of poems dealing with the personal history of the monarch, his birth, his youthful adventures, his domestic trials, his fabled journey to the East, and final coronation of his son as his successor. A second and more important group deals with his various wars, principally those with the Saxons and the Saracens,[1] and is connected with the subsidiary but highly interesting cycle of the Narbonnais, the heroic family of Aimeri de Narbonne, whose son, William of Orange, is the

[1] For romantic purposes the wars with the Lombards practically do not count, as the authors of the romances have largely confounded them with the Saracens. We shall refer to this again in connection with *Ogier le Danois*.

champion of Christianity against the Moslem invaders of the South of France. The third subdivision includes the romances which relate the internecine struggles of the great vassals with their over-lord, and counts among its number some of the most popular legends of the whole cycle.

While thus practically following historical lines, the compilers of the *chansons* have, however, by no means limited themselves to events occurring during the reign of the great Emperor, but freely transfer incidents from one period to another at their pleasure, ascribing to Charlemagne's reign what really happened under his predecessor, Charles Martel, or his successor, Charles le Chauve, and presenting the heroes of the *gestes* as living now under Charlemagne, now under his son Louis, thus involving the attainment of a truly patriarchal age. According to the author of the *Chanson de Roland*, Charlemagne was over two hundred years old at the date of Roncevaux, and, to rightly understand the historical background of the cycle, we must bear in mind that the conditions, social and political, there represented actually obtained for some three hundred years or so, and were by no means limited to the period covered by the reign of the son of Pepin. The anachronism exists, but it is not of such a nature as to destroy the value of the poetical representation.

In the romances dealing with the youth of

Charlemagne[1] we are on mythical rather than on historical ground. The story of his mother, *Berte aux grans piés*, is the familiar and oft-told tale of "The False Bride," the waiting-maid substituted for her mistress, and as such belongs to the domain of Folk-lore. Equally the tale of his youthful adventures, when he flies from the death by poison prepared for him by the sons of the false maid, and under the name of *Mainet* takes refuge with the King of Spain, frees him from his enemies, and marries his daughter, is a creation of fiction, and has no historical basis. The chronicle of Eginhard distinctly states that nothing definite concerning Charlemagne's youth was known, and the author therefore judged it inadvisable to write of it. But it seems doubtful whether the name by which the great Emperor is known did not take its rise in this popular fiction, and Charlemagne be not derived from *Charles Mainet*, the two names being often coupled together, rather than from *Carolus Magnus*. In any case it is to be regretted that so many English writers of the present day substitute the common-place translation Charles the Great, for the time-honoured and far more impressive Charlemagne.

These tales, and other scattered legends relating

1 I only refer in the text to the more important members of each subdivision; they will be found fully enumerated in the bibliographical appendix.

to the personality of the great Emperor, are to be found in the vast compilation of the Venice Library, consisting of a number of the *Chansons* collected together under the name of *Charlemagne;* also in the Icelandic *Karlomagnus Saga*, which latter, however, begins the record of his adventures at a rather later date. A German poem, *Karl Meinet*, has preserved the account of his residence in Spain.

Purely fabulous, too, are the accounts of Charlemagne's journey to Jerusalem, accompanied by his twelve peers, and the extravagant feats they perform in fulfilment of their *gabs* or boasts; and of the false accusation of his Queen Blanchefleur, by the traitor Macaire—a version of which, under the title of *La reine Sibille*, enjoyed a widespread popularity.

The real interest of the legend lies not in Charlemagne's domestic life, but in his public actions; the energy with which he defended Christianity, and consolidated the Empire. This is, as we have said above, the historical element of the legend which, reflected in the romances, constitutes the distinctive feature and real importance of the cycle. The Emperor's object was obtained only at the cost of wars, foreign and domestic, and with such struggles the majority of the romances are concerned.

For poetical purposes the foes of the Emperor beyond his border were the Saxons and the

Saracens; both were alike enemies of God and of Holy Church, but the poems dealing with the latter are not only more numerous, but strike a stronger and a truer note. This may, of course, be largely owing to the fact that much of the struggle was fought out on the soil of France, and the reality of the contest was thus more forcibly brought home to the imagination of the writers. The gulf of nationality, too, was wider; there was less difference between the barbarous Saxon and semi-civilised Frank, both white races, than between the latter and the dusky hordes that swarmed from Africa through Spain into Southern France, even though these latter might be representatives of a civilisation older than that of the West. Wotan and Thor, barbarous as were their rites, never seem to have raised half as much horror and antagonism in the minds of mediæval Christians as did the fabulous gods of the Saracens, Mahmoud, Termagant, and Apollo! In mediæval romance the iconoclastic followers of Islam are represented as idolaters of a monstrous type, a quintessence of all the evils of paganism and heathenism, and they are provided with a motley pantheon borrowed from classic tradition, supplemented by the fertile imagination of romancers. Over and over again these heathen hordes are represented as besieging Rome, sometimes as having gained possession of the Imperial city, and holding in their power the most

precious relics of Christendom. More than once Charlemagne marches to the relief of *l'Apôtre*—as the Pope is generally termed in French romance—which relief is as a rule effected by a single combat between one of the Christian Paladins, and a giant more or less malicious, more or less willing to be converted, representing the Saracen host. It is the "motif" of David and Goliath repeated *ad nauseam*.

For such romances as *Aspremont*, *Les Enfances Ogier*, and *Fierabras*, there is no real foundation in history. The most that can be said is that they represent a distorted reminiscence of the siege of Rome by the Lombards.

But when we come to the group of poems dealing with Charlemagne's expedition to Spain, and culminating in the *Chanson de Roland*, we are on surer ground: history has indeed been modified under the influence of the Saracen nightmare, but we are dealing with modification, not with invention. Briefly related, the facts as chronicled by Eginhard and others are these:—In 778 two Moorish emirs from Spain presented themselves before the Emperor and declared their desire to become his vassals. Encouraged by this, Charlemagne marched with a large army into Spain, besieged and took Pampeluna, and laid siege in vain to Saragossa. (This part of the expedition is found, much embellished, in the following romances: *L'Entrée en*

Espagne, *La Prise de Pampelune*, and *Gui de Bourgogne*.) On the return of the army to France, the rear guard was surprised by the Gascons in the defile of Roncevaux, in the Pyrenees, and practically exterminated, Roland, prefect of the marches of Brittany, being among the slain. M. Leon Gautier remarks that this defeat must have been of far more importance than the chroniclers care to admit. Certain it is, that they pass over in but few words an event which has left an indelible impression on the popular mind, and the echoes of which can be caught at every subsequent period of French history. It is probable, too, that the Saracens lent a helping hand to the Gascon ambuscade. It is certain that tradition has forgotten the real authors of this shattering blow to the Emperor's prestige, and attributes it to the hereditary foe of Christianity, the Moslem.

But whatever be the true history of Roncevaux, the legend is the culminating point of the Charlemagne tradition. French scholars have vied with each other in praise of the *Chanson de Roland*, its dignity, its simplicity, and the lofty tone of courage, devotion, and patriotism which inspires it, and any unprejudiced critic must largely agree with them. 'It is not the work of a finished poet like Chrétien de Troyes, it has not the easy literary grace which marks the *lais* of Marie de France, but the force and directness of its language, and the

universality of the feelings to which it makes appeal, can never fail to awake a response. We sympathise alike with Roland in his desire to fight unaided the unequal combat; with Oliver in his calmer appreciation of the overwhelming odds against them, and his vain attempts to induce his headstrong friend to realise the truth; with Archbishop Turpin as he solemnly absolves the doomed army, and, having thus performed his duty as a Christian and cleric, gives valiant account of himself as man and warrior. All alike are inspired by one spirit, by the desire that none shall hereafter sing *male cançun* regarding their end.

Perhaps the most impressive and affecting part of the poem is the lament of Charlemagne over the dead body of his heroic nephew, when in pathetic words he paints the picture of his return to France, how he shall sit throned in the hall of Laon, and the representatives of the races subdued by Roland's aid shall come before him and ask tidings of the valiant captain of his host, and he must needs answer, "In Spain he lieth dead!" Then they, taking courage at the tidings, shall rebel against him, and who shall put them down? The poem might well have ended here, as indeed, in the earlier versions, it doubtless did. The defeat of the Saracen army, and the punishment meted out to Ganelon and his race, come somewhat as an anti-climax.

It may be worth while to ask here, what is the historic foundation for the heroic character of Roland? The chronicle of Eginhard, relating the catastrophe of Roncevaux, simply says: "Anselmus comes palatini, *et Hruodlandus Britannici limitis præfectus*, cum aliis compluribus interficiuntur."[1] Thus, here, Roland is simply prefect of the marches of Brittany, and no word is said of his relationship to the Emperor. It may seriously be doubted whether such a relationship did, in fact, exist. History records that Charlemagne had but one sister, who early became a nun, and thus could not possibly have been the mother of Roland. The relationship of uncle and nephew, as subsisting between the royal centre of an epic cycle and the hero of that cycle, is so general (*e.g.* the instances of Conchobar and Cuchulinn, Finn and Diarmid, Mark and Tristan, Arthur and Gawain), that it does not seem improbable that the Charlemagne legend may have been affected by the prevailing tradition. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that certain twelfth century texts represent Roland as not merely the *nephew*, but also the *son* of the Emperor, a feature manifestly borrowed from tradition, and highly primitive in character. Such is the relation between Sigmund and Sinfiotli in the Volsunga-

[1] Eginhard, *Vita Caroli IX.*, quoted by M. Gautier, *Épopées Françaises*, ii. p. 363.

saga, Arthur and Mordred (in the first instance it was probably Gawain), and, in some versions of the story, between Conchobar and Cuchulinn. Thus, while we may take it as settled that history determined the character and fate of Roland, it yet seems probable that his relationship to Charlemagne was due to the influence of mythic tradition.

The twelve peers, Roland's companions, who, according to the poem, shared his fate at Roncevaux, owed their origin, M. Gautier considers, to Germanic custom. Among primitive German tribes it was the rule for certain warriors to associate themselves closely with the chief of the clan, to share with him his dangers and his spoil. They were his *pairs*. Hence, M. Gautier[1] thinks the *douze pairs*, their number being an imitation of that of the Apostles. M. Gaston Paris is, however, inclined to consider the institution of later date. The names of the peers vary in different poems, and two of the most famous of Charlemagne's warriors—Naimes de Baviere and Turpin—do not appear to have belonged to this body. According to *Girard de Viane*, it was Naimes who persuaded the Emperor to institute the order, as a kind of superior tribunal of judgment (cf. *supra*). The extreme popularity of the peers is shown by the introduction of their title into English mediæval

[1] *Épopées Françaises*, vol. ii. p. 173.

romance, where we often find the word "*dosypere*" as equivalent for a valiant knight.

Compared with the *Chanson de Roland*, the poems dealing with the Saxon wars, *Guiteclin* and *La Chanson des Saisnes*, are far inferior in interest, marked by inordinate length and wearisome repetition of incident.

The third group of romances, those which relate the story of the Emperor's struggle with his rebellious vassals, is, taken as a whole, the most interesting of the three. Two among the number, *Renaud de Montauban* (*les quatre fils Aymon*) and *Huon de Bordeaux*, were in all probability the most popular and widely known of the Charlemagne romances, and have more or less retained that popularity to our own time.

Good mediæval translations of both are published by the Early English Text Society. The former gives a very fine picture of the relations between a vassal and his feudal lord, and the manner in which, among the nobler natures of the time, the obligations imposed by feudal service were realised and fulfilled. Charlemagne is entirely in the wrong in his treatment of the four brothers, but the old knight, Aymon, feels himself compelled by his oath of fealty to extend no aid or countenance of any kind to his sons. When in dire need they throw themselves upon the protection of their mother, who receives them with open arms, Aymon leaves

the castle at their disposal and goes forth; he will not break his vow by aiding them, nor will he forbid his wife to follow the instincts of natural affection. Renaud, the principal hero of the tale, has as keen a sense of honour as his father; when his clever and resourceful cousin Maugis, whose wiles have been the salvation of the brothers, casts the Emperor into a magic slumber, and thus conveys him into the castle he has been besieging, Renaud refuses to profit by what he deems a disloyal action, and sends Charlemagne again to his host in safety: a forbearance which, it must be owned, the Emperor's conduct does not justify! The four sons of Aymon and their gallant steed, Bayard, were deservedly popular; indeed, in folk tradition Bayard still roams the forests of Ardennes.

Here we may point out the gradual declension which the character of the Emperor, as represented in the romances, undergoes. In the *Chanson de Roland* he is a venerable but an imposing and dignified figure; in *Renaud de Montauban* and *Huon de Bordeaux* he is capricious, tyrannical, given to fits of senile rage, cruel and unjust in the highest degree; his barons openly flout him, and the authors do not hesitate to stigmatise him as *un vieil radoté*. How are we to account for so fundamental a change of conception? It seems clear that it was due to historic

causes, and was the outcome of a radical change in the relations between sovereign and subject. Under the feebler rule of the great Emperor's successors the power of the feudatory barons became increased to an alarming extent. The later romances, faithfully reproducing the characteristics of their age, have shifted the point of interest from the feeble and vacillating monarch to the rebellious but powerful vassal.

If the authors had maintained throughout the identity of the king during whose reign the romance was compiled, or remodelled, the picture would have been complete; but the position of Charlemagne as centre of the *Matière de France* was so firmly grounded, that they continued to retain him as representative of a system entirely alien to his methods. The relations between William of Orange and King Louis, in *Aliscans*, are quite possible, and a legitimate and artistic presentment of the situation as conceived under the reign of that king; postulated of Charlemagne they are incorrect and misleading. The character of the Emperor has really suffered from the continued popularity of his cycle, and the need of adjusting the romances to contemporary social conditions.

The romance of *Ogier le Danois*, consisting of no fewer than twelve branches, belongs, in so far as the older portion is concerned, to the earlier and

better period of the Charlemagne cycle, but it is somewhat marred by the barbarous fierceness and savagery of the hero.

Nevertheless, certain portions of the story have an epic force and vigour which raise them to the first rank of romantic legend. Such is the account of the prolonged siege of Chastelfort by the Emperor, a siege lasting for over seven years, during the progress of which all Ogier's men are slain; but the undaunted hero makes figures of wood, and clothing them in the armour of the dead knights, succeeds in deluding his foes into the belief that the castle is fully garrisoned. Also the charming story of the recognition of Ogier, after many years' imprisonment, by his faithful steed, *Broiefort*, which has been made the draught-horse of the neighbouring monastery, but retains sufficient spirit to carry its aged master to victory once more.

This story of a hero and his faithful steed was extremely popular in mediæval times, and we find it ascribed to Walter of Aquitaine (Waltharius) in the *Chronica Novalense*, an interesting monkish compilation of romantic legend; to Heimi, in the *Thidrek Saga;* and to William of Orange, in the *Moniage Guillaume;* in the two first cases the hero being a monk, and in the third a hermit—not a prisoner, as Ogier. The monastic version M. Gaston Paris holds to be the earliest form of

the story, of which the *Chronica* probably gives the oldest extant version, the *Thidrek Saga* being probably borrowed from a Lombard chronicle.

In the older parts of the Ogier romance we have an account of Charlemagne's war with the King of the Lombards, at whose court the hero seeks shelter. This is an historic feature, and of the more value in that, as we have noted above, the tendency of the later romances is to ignore the wars with the Lombards, and in the traditions relative to the siege of Rome to replace them by the Saracens.

The character of the hero appears to be more or less founded on fact; there was certainly at Charlemagne's court a valiant soldier of the name of *Oggerius*, or Otkar, but his nationality is doubtful. Certain chronicles speak of him as of the family of Pepin, in which case he would, of course, be a kinsman of the Emperor. The title *Danois* is by some modern scholars held to be a misreading of the original *Ardennois*, and Ogier is thought to have been of the Ardennes rather than of Denmark. In its final stages the tale shows distinct traces of Celtic influence; and this modern scholars have strongly felt. Mr. Nutt, in the study already referred to, remarks that Huon and Ogier are "Arthurian heroes who have strayed by accident to the court of Charlemagne;" and the late William Morris, in that fascinating collection of legendary

tales, *The Earthly Paradise*, gives the story of *Ogier the Dane* to a Breton sailor. Nevertheless, in its essential spirit the tale appears to be Germanic rather than Celtic.

According to the testimony of the chroniclers, Ogier was one of the most popular of mediæval heroes, but the numerous romances connected with his name have not retained their popularity as have *Renaud de Montauban* and *Huon de Bordeaux*. To-day most of us probably only know him through the medium of Hans Andersen's tales, though but few realise that the slumbering Danish hero Olge Danske is identical with the paladin of Charlemagne.

Both the romance of *Ogier le Danois* and that of *Renaud de Montauban*, if classified according to the family method suggested by M. Gautier, would belong to the *Geste* of *Doon de Mayence;* but the fact that that scholar himself was obliged also to include them in the *Geste du roi* seems an argument for the simpler method adopted by M. Gaston Paris, and followed in these pages.[1]

The tale of *Huon de Bordeaux* is less character-

[1] The romances belonging to the *Doon* family are found in a collected form in a MS. of the Montpellier Library. They are the following:—*Doon de Mayence*, *Gaufrey*, *Les Enfances Ogier*, *La Chevalerie Ogier*, *Aye de Avignon*, *Gui de Nanteuil*, *Parise la Duchesse*, *Maugis d'Aigremont*, *Vivien l'amachour de Monbranc*, *Renaud de Montauban*. Of these only the two mentioned above are of the first rank. *Parise la Duchesse* is a variant of the *Berte* and *Macaire* stories.

istic of any special age. The interest lies rather in the marvellous adventures of the hero, and the aid and protection extended to him by the fairy king Oberon. It is a tale of faëry not only in the loose but in the strict sense of the word, Huon's adventures reproducing closely those of the hero upon whom a task is laid which he can only accomplish by supernatural aid familiar to us in so many fairy tales, and as such it is one for all time. From it Shakespeare borrowed his fairy king, and Weber the libretto of his opera.

Among the romances of this class *Girard de Viane*, one of the oldest, is interesting as giving the account of the first meeting between Roland and Oliver; they fight themselves into friendship beneath the walls of Viane.

In most of these tales Charlemagne is represented as in extreme old age, in fact, as we have shown above, an unreasoning dotard, *un vieil radoté!* We therefore feel that the situation depicted in the *Couronnement Looys* is natural and inevitable; it may be considered as practically closing the cycle of Charlemagne and opening that of William of Orange, though there are, of course, poems dealing with the earlier history of that hero.

In the *Couronnement* we find the aged Emperor laying aside his crown in favour of his young son Louis, who, gentle and timid in disposition, shrinks from the responsibilities awaiting him. A

certain Hernaud, of the traitorous race of Ganelon, comes forward with an offer to rule the kingdom till Louis feels himself prepared to take up the reins of government, but *William Fierabras*, detecting the traitorous purpose concealed beneath the offer, fells the traitor to the ground, and announces that he will be the protector and champion of the young king, a task he loyally performs.

The historic personality underlying the epic figure of this William, the hero of the important cycle of the *Narbonnais*, is not clear. Investigation discloses even more forcibly than elsewhere in the cycle of how composite a texture it really is, and how it welds together in one picture, periods separated by the stretch of centuries, regions separated by the width of France. Monsieur Gaston Paris considers that the legendary hero represents a reminiscence of the feats of at least four historical Williams, *i.e.* William *Fierabras*, William *au court nez*, William of Toulouse, and William of Orange. Of these William *Fierabras* (who may, but this is doubtful, have borne the appellation *au court nez*) and William of Aquitaine, later of Orange, were contemporaries of the great Emperor, but the one belonged to northern, the other to southern France. William of Toulouse, undoubtedly an historical character, and one of whom we possess

a fair amount of authentic record, belonged to the tenth century. His was a striking personality, and he seems to have attracted stories belonging to the earlier William of Orange. Moreover, in the epic, William, when old, turns monk, and here would seem to have borrowed traits from two southern French saints, S. William *du Désert* and S. William *le Pieux*. Certain it is that the titles *Fierabras*, *au court nez*, and *d'Orange*, are all applied to one hero. But in those days *William* was the most common of Christian names. In a certain assemblage of nobles out of five hundred present three hundred and eighty were William; a fact which goes far to explain any confusion of identity which may have crept into the legend.

According to the romances, however, the parentage and personality of this William, though his surnames may vary, are distinct enough. He is the son of Aimeri de Narbonne, a descendant of that Garin de Montglane who, as we mentioned at the outset of our study, represents the heroic family or *geste* of the cycle. An extensive Italian compilation of the fourteenth century, under the title of *Storie Nerbonese*, recounts all the doings of the valiant family of Narbonne.

M. Gautier reckons twenty-four *chansons* composing this cycle, but here we need only enumerate those directly connected with the life and deeds of

the hero, *Les Enfances Guillaume*,[1] *Siège de Narbonne*, *Le Charroi de Nîmes*, *La prise d'Orange*. These trace the history of William from his earliest years to his establishing himself as lord of Orange, from which city he has driven out the Saracens, and married the wife of their king. The loves of William and Orable, who in the later poems is known by her baptismal name, Guibourc, occupy a great portion of the story.

At this point another hero appears upon the scene, Vivien, the nephew of William, whose valiant deeds and untimely death appear to have been intended as a parallel to Roland in the earlier story. The poems directly connected with this young hero are *Les Enfances Vivien*, *Le Covenant Vivien*, and the famous *Aliscans*; this last being the crown and centre of the "William" cycle, even as the *Chanson de Roland* is of that of Charlemagne. Both poems relate the defeat of the Christians by the Saracens, and in both the catastrophe is due to the rashness of the youthful hero.

In the *Covenant Vivien* we learn how the youth, on receiving knighthood, makes a solemn vow never to retreat before the Saracens, a vow which even

[1] Perhaps it may be well to explain that *Enfances* is a technical term applied to the account of the deeds of a hero before he receives knighthood. The tendency of later research is to prove that the "William" cycle was of greater importance than generally supposed.

his uncle William, no model of prudence, condemns as unduly rash. A large Saracen fleet appears on the river beyond the plains of Aliscans (Aliscans-Aliscamps = Elysian Fields, and is the name of the famous cemetery beyond the walls of Arles). Vivien urges on his young comrades to attack them, which the lads do with an wholly inadequate force, and are put to the worse. Under pressure Vivien allows one of his cousins to ride to his uncle William and demand aid, and the poem of *Aliscans* opens at the conclusion of the fatal struggle. William has seen all his men slain, his young nephews, his brother's sons, taken captive, and is compelled to fly from the field. But first he must know the fate of Vivien; he seeks him at imminent risk to himself, and at last finds the lad mortally wounded, and at the point of death, beside a spring. The scene that follows is exceptionally fine; the count at first yields to a natural outburst of grief at the death of one so young and valiant, but suddenly he recalls himself to a sense of his duty. No priest is at hand; Vivien is dying fast; it devolves upon William as nearest of kin to render the consolations of religion. The warrior becomes a priest; taking the dying boy in his arms he rests his head against his breast and bids him confess his sins. Vivien can think of nothing save that he has broken his vow, and retreated before the enemy. William pronounces

absolution ; for the first time gives him *le pain béni*, and commends his soul to God.

> "Dex reçoif s'arme par ton digne commant
> Qu en ton sierviche est mors en Aliscans!"

This scene of the first communion and death of Vivien has been held by critics equal, if not superior, to that of the death of Roland.

The author of *Aliscans* is not a literary artist, he repeats himself, indulges in lengthy description, but the subject-matter with which he is dealing in the first half of the poem is exceptionally good, and he rises to the occasion. Very fine is the description of the arrival of William, a fugitive, and alone, disguised in the armour of a dead Saracen, at the gates of his own city of Orange. His wife does not know him in such guise ; William would never have returned without the lads he went to succour ; and not till the pursuers are close on his heels does Guibourc recognise and admit her husband. Then she shows herself the stronger of the two ; it is she who comforts the Count, broken down by the disaster which has overtaken his house, and bids him hasten at once to demand succour from King Louis ; she and her maidens dressed in armour, will delude the Saracens into the belief that Orange is fully garrisoned, and keep them at bay. William goes to the court of the king whom he has protected and aided, and who has wedded

his sister, only to be treated with scorn and contempt. This is one of the finest parts of the romance. Eventually Louis yields, in sheer terror of his truculent brother-in-law, and William is provided with a new army—and the poem with a new hero in the person of Renouart, the gigantic brother of William's wife, Guibourc, who, stolen from his people in early youth, is acting the part of scullion in Louis' kitchen.

The latter part of the poem is taken up with the recital of the valiant deeds of Renouart in the second battle of Aliscans, which results in a crushing defeat of the Saracens. Finally Renouart marries Aaliz, the king's daughter, and in the *Bataille de Loquifer* (a poem probably by the author of *Aliscans*, but much inferior to that work) is carried off to Avalon, where he combats the monster Chapalu in the presence of Arthur, King of Avalon.

The poem of *Aliscans* undoubtedly rests upon historical tradition; in the opinion of M. Leon Gautier, it represents the welding together of two widely separated events—the defeat of William of Aquitaine by the Saracens at Villedaigne in 793, and the defeat of the Saracens by William I., of Provence, in 976. The leading "motif" of the *geste* of the Narbonnais, the long-continued struggle between Christian and Moslem for the South of France, is genuinely historical.

The end of William's career is related in two romances, both bearing the same name, *Le Moniage Guillaume*, and generally referred to by scholars as *Moniage I.* and *Moniage II.*, in which we read how the hero eventually quitted the world and retired to the hermitage, where (after again issuing forth to combat the enemies of his country) he died in the odour of sanctity. A similar romance bears the name of Renouart, and relates how that hero also became a monk ; but it is impossible to take any real interest in a figure so completely the creation of imagination. Renouart is never more than a serio-comic character, and distinctly out of place beside so strenuous a hero as William ; nevertheless he appealed to the fancy of the Middle Ages, and was certainly a more living and persistent element in folk-tradition than the far more sympathetic Vivien.[1]

With the battle of Aliscans it seems fitting that we should close this brief sketch of the great French cycle. That the Charlemagne romances will ever offer to English students so tempting a field of inquiry as that of the Arthurian legend is doubtful. The subject-matter of this latter, consisting as it does largely of the mythical elements which lie at the root of all history and all belief, must

[1] The story of scullion turned hero seems to have been popular in mediæval times. There is a version of it in the Low German Thidrek Saga.

always make an appeal to a wider circle than that represented by professed students of history or literature. We have adopted Arthur as a national hero, and as such take a pride in his name and fame, but the interest of the Arthurian story lies deeper than our interest in Arthur the King, and the ideas he symbolises are not those which inspire the *Matière de France*. The Charlemagne legend, on the other hand, is of direct national interest; it appeals above all to the children and lovers of *La douce France*. Nor from a literary point of view is it of equal value. Probably the four best romances, in the opinion of literary scholars, would be reckoned to be the *Chanson de Roland*, *Renaud de Montauban*, *Huon de Bordeaux*, and *Aliscans*; but not one of these could bear comparison, as a piece of literature, with any one of the masterpieces of Arthurian romance. I have suggested above that it may be owing, in a great measure, to this deficiency in literary form, and consequent failure to satisfy the more exacting literary taste of the twelfth century, that the Charlemagne cycle was superseded so completely in popular favour by the Arthurian romances. If, however, we distinguish content from manner, the *Matière de France*, as an epic cycle, ranks above the Arthurian, which is not strictly epic; regarded in this light, the *Chanson de Roland* has few rivals. And were it only as a picture of

the impression produced by a great man upon the minds and imaginations of the people of his day, an unrivalled collection of documents showing how fancy deals with facts, and history becomes folk-tale, the *Matière de France* would be well worth our study; our fathers found pleasure in these old stories, and we shall not do ill if we follow their example.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX[1]

[*I am indebted to Mr. Nutt for revising and bringing the Bibliography up to date.*]

THE standard works upon the Charlemagne legend as a whole are the two mentioned in the text, *Les Epopées Françaises*, by M. Léon Gautier (4 vols., 1878 82), incomplete, the poems dealing with Doon de Mayence not being included, and *L'Histoire poétique de Charlemagne* (1865), by M. Gaston Paris. Of the latter, a new edition by M. M. Paul Meyer and J. Bédier has just been published (17s. 6d.). *Les Epopées* is out of print, and costs about £5. An indispensable supplement for serious students to M. Gautier's great work is his *Bibliographie des Chansons de Geste*, 1877.

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In the list which follows the dates in brackets are those of the recension which has come down to us, as fixed by M. Léon Gautier in his *Épopées Françaises*.

[1] Of the poems marked by an asterisk new editions are being prepared.

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